

Henry Baldwin to Andrew Jackson, November 3, 1831, from Correspondence of Andrew Jackson. Edited by John Spencer Bassett.

HENRY BALDWIN TO JACKSON.¹

¹ In view of the criticism of Jackson's style of writing, the attention of the reader is directed to the paragraphing, punctuation, and capitalization in this letter. The writer of it was born in New Haven, graduated at Yale, achieved distinction as a lawyer in Connecticut and in Pennsylvania, became an ornament of the Federalist party, which sent him to Congress for three terms, and was a justice of the United States Supreme Court at the time the letter was written. It will not do to conclude that Mr. Justice Baldwin was illiterate. He read the best books continually. Yet in this letter he cared nothing for his own punctuation, he ignored the rules for capitalization, and he was innocent of any intention to relieve the reader's tedium by dividing the matter into paragraphs. Why this result? Probably it was sheer indifference to literary form. Many of the letters of the day are full of the same fault. The editor has set himself to reproduce them as they are. But through regard for the reader he has usually revised the paragraphing. In this particular letter however he has left the matter as it came from the writer, in order that the reader may see what kind of paragraphing might be committed by a man who had received every educational advantage that the country had to offer him in his day.

Philadelphia, November 3, 1831.

Dear Sir, In relation to your confidential letter to Mr. Munro in 1818 my recollection is not from personal knowledge as I never saw it neither have I any personal knowledge of its having been in the possession of Mr. Lacock or any of the members of the committee on that subject in 1819. I was informed then that he had access to all the correspondence

Library of Congress

on the Subject of the Seminole war including your confidential letters and that the report of the committee of the Senate disclose many important facts not developed in the discussion which had taken place in the house of Representatives but which would entirely change the attitude in which their vote had placed you before the Nation. The date of the 6 January was not impressed on my mind at the time but my understanding was that the whole of the correspondence public and confidential was before the committee of the Senate by the procurement of Mr Lacock whose friends assumed great merit to him for having discovered what had been up to that time unknown. I have not his report but am confident that he refers to some letters of yours not before published or in any way noticed which showed that he had other means of information than what were possessed by the committee of the house. I was on the foreign committee and was engaged very laboriously for a month in the investigation of this subject through every source of information before the committee or within my reach on seeing Mr. Lacocks report it was unaccountable to me that he should have become possessed of letters which had not been communicated to the committee of foreign relations which is a confidential one, or the committee on military affairs which was likewise charged with the same subject. Mr. Lacock took up this subject with much warmth and zeal. he was very intimate with Mr Munro at that time whose confidence he possessed in a very high degree it was then and is now my belief that he had a more free access to every source of information than had been had by any member of any other committee to whom this subject had been referred and that he had seen every paper that had passed between you and the President but there is no fact within my recollection which would enable me to say that he had seen the letter alluded to His intercourse and mine was limited and far from friendly. the Seminole war was a subject on which we could not converse Col Johnson of Kentucky was on terms of intimacy with Mr. Lacock at that time it is very probable that he had conversation with him which would give more light on this subject than is in my power to do Mr Lowrie the Secretary of the Senate may have heard the whole matter detailed by Lacock he succeeded him in the Senate in 1819 and was a member when your memorial in reply to Lacocks report was presented as that Report caused a good deal of excitement in our part of the country

Library of Congress

in the spring and summer of 1819 it would be an interesting matter to Mr Lowrie who would expect to hear some reply to it in the Senate at the next session it would be well for some friend to have a conversation with him on the subject. Jonothan Roberts was then a senator from this state he was an enragii² about the Seminole war the coadjutor and bosom friend of Lacock acting together on all occasions Roberts has a strong memory especially on all subjects on which he has suffered his passions to take a wide scope as

² Presumably *enragé* was intended, meaning, one enraged.

he did on this He must know everything which Lacock did and have seen every paper which was in the possession of the other and would I think readily communicate it on an application made to him by some personal friend of his own It would not be prudent that he should know that you or any of your friends felt any concern about any matter within his knowledge but as there is probably no person who could give a better account of all the papers which were submitted to the committee or communicated to Lacock I would suggest the propriety of an application to him keeping your name wholly out of view, if you approve of it I will have it done through some person who will know me as the only person interested in the inquiry the part I took in the Seminole discussion connected with my opposition to Mr. Calhoun and his late conduct will be in his mind an obvious reason for my desiring all the information which Mr. Roberts can give

I am very happy in hearing of the perfect restoration of your health

Yours with esteem